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ART. XI. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *Passages from the History of Liberty*. By SAMUEL ELIOT. Boston: William D. Ticknor & Co. 1847. 16mo. pp. 278.

THIS little book, planned not only in the spirit of scholarship, but in profound sympathy with the services to humanity rendered by the great men whom it commemorates, is an interesting labor of a student earnestly devoted to high moral and intellectual purposes. The idea is to show, in a connected way, the toils and sufferings borne by isolated individuals, in the cause of reform and human progress, during the mediæval period; to gather, as it were, into one bright picture the scattered rays of light illumining here and there the darkness of that night which preceded the glad dawn of modern civilization and civil and religious liberty. The study of the Middle Ages, and especially of the Italian Republics, in that period of confusion and transition, is necessary to the full understanding of the struggles endured and the progress made by men and states for the last three centuries. In Milton's comprehensive scheme of reading, this department of history is said to have occupied fifteen months. But in Milton's time, all the bearings of that act in the world's drama could not, of course, have been appreciated.

One great source of interest in Mr. Eliot's little book is the true perception he has and so clearly expresses, of the individuality of the men whom he has selected for commemoration. Great as is the influence each has exerted upon the course of human affairs, each stood upon his own strength, contending against overpowering odds of hostile interests, and risking every thing in the encounter. To recall these great but obscured names to our present contemplation was a pious duty to the illustrious dead; and lovingly and piously has that duty been performed. The researches of the young scholar have been given to objects of pure and permanent interest. The motive and design of this work are excellent. Enlightened and comprehensive views of the moral dignity of the persons and scenes he describes, and a religious sense of the dealings of Providence with the history of man, seem ever present to the mind and conscience of the author. The style, with some faults and mannerisms which further experience will remove or amend, is clear and perspicuous. The various scholarship which Mr. Eliot has treasured up in travel and study is used, not for show, but to furnish the

materials of his work, and is consecrated to the high aims of Christian philanthropy.

The materials of the work are distributed in four general divisions. The first embraces the history of the early Italian reformers. In this division, the isolation of the Middle Ages is first graphically delineated; then, under the three somewhat quaint titles of Labor for Liberty, Labor for Peace, and Labor for Country, we have, as exponents and symbols of the principles these topics involve, well-drawn historical sketches of Arnaldo da Brescia, Giovanni di Vicenza, and Jacopo de' Bussolari. The peculiar merits of these men, whose great spirits far outran their ages, are set forth and illustrated with fulness of knowledge, clearness of apprehension, and sympathy of feeling. In the concluding section of this part, the failures in such reforms are ably discussed.

In our judgment, the second division of the book, which is exclusively occupied with the life and labors of John Wycliffe, is the most able and valuable. The services of this truly Christian and most admirable person—who, to most minds, even now is but the shadow of a mighty name, a distant foreboding only of Luther—are here distinctly traced and developed. We see in them the germ of those great additions to human happiness and liberty which have occupied the minds of men during the last three centuries, and some of which even the present age is employed in making or perfecting. The scope of his reforms embraced church and state; and the nineteenth century has scarcely surpassed the wise and Christian spirit in which those reforms were conceived, and so far as lay in the power of the Reformer himself, carried into effect. Mr. Eliot adorns his work with striking expressions from Wycliffe's writings. Among the most remarkable things about this man was the view he took of war, astonishing for his age, for even the nineteenth century is not sufficiently Christianized to renounce this direst work of the Devil. "What honor," exclaims Wycliffe, "falls to a knight that he kills many men? The hangman killeth many more, and with a better title; better were it for men to be butchers of swine than slayers of their brethren."

The third division is occupied with the reforms of Savonarola, and the fourth, with the war of the Communities in Castile. These complete Mr. Eliot's well-considered plan. We regard the book, notwithstanding occasional crudities of sentiment and expression, as a valuable contribution to historical literature.